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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000951

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [EAID](#) [PREL](#) [CVIS](#) [CASC](#) [UNGA](#) [BM](#) [KPAO](#)  
SUBJECT: POSITIVE SIGNS AT NAY PYI TAW MEETINGS: MINISTRIES  
OF INFORMATION, CULTURE, AND EDUCATION

REF: RANGOON 854

Classified By: APAO Drake Weisert for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

#### Summary

1. (C) PAO and APAO visited Nay Pyi Taw on December 10 for courtesy calls at the Ministries of Information, Culture, and Education. The meeting with Ministry of Information officials was particularly productive, as they asked for Embassy assistance in obtaining English-language programming for the state-run television station and expressed interest in cooperation on journalism training. The meetings with the Ministries of Culture and Education were less productive; still all of the officials seemed genuinely pleased at the opportunity to meet with U.S. officials and were interested in future cooperation. End Summary.

#### Meeting with GOB Counterparts

2. (C) During an October 29-30 visit to Nay Pyi Taw, PAO and APAO met separately with the Deputy Director General (DDG) of Information and Public Relations and the Director General (DG) of Myanmar Radio and Television at the Ministry of Information; the DG of Fine Arts at the Ministry of Culture; and the DG of Educational Planning and Training at the Ministry of Education. The meetings took place at the respective Ministry headquarters, all of which were identical in design and size and already showed signs of deterioration. They also paid a short courtesy call on Ministry of Foreign Affairs North American Division Director Yin Yin Oo, where we raised the topic of delays in obtaining visas for American Center staff. No new ground was broken.

#### Interest in the U.S. at the Ministry of Information

3. (C) Burmese officials from the Ministry of Information were surprisingly engaging and devoid of polemics. Deputy DG of Information and Public Relations U Ye Htut noted at the outset that it had been "many years" since his office had met any U.S. Embassy officials and said he was pleased at the opportunity. He noted that his colleague in attendance, DG of Myanmar Radio and Television (MRTV) U Khin Maung Htay, had attended military training in the United States in 1983 and said he himself was prepared to participate in similar training in 1988, when the events of that year cancelled his plans. (All of the officials in attendance were former colonels and majors, as were the DGs of the ministries of Culture and Education.) Deputy DG U Ye Htut noted that he and his colleagues were avid CNN viewers and that he was once a member of the American Center library. In that regard, he welcomed receiving up-to-date information and articles from the Center (which we will arrange).

14. (C) DG U Khin Maung Htay noted that state-run MRTV broadcasted the American English-language educational program "Family Album USA" in the 1980s (via then Worldnet TV), and said he hoped the U.S. Embassy could provide assistance in obtaining similar programming in the future. PAO explained that the successor to Worldnet TV, VOA TV, broadcasts similar programs free of charge. MRTV would have to sign an agreement for broadcasting rights and could then receive the satellite coordinates to begin transmitting domestically. PAO also inquired about a Rangoon-based journalism school - the only such school in Burma. Deputy DG U Ye Htut said the school has been in existence for approximately one year and is open to the public. He noted that the school falls under the Ministry of Education, rather than Information, but said he was in favor of any Embassy support for Burma's fledgling media sector.

Ministries of Culture and Education  
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15. (C) The meeting at the Ministry of Culture was similarly cordial. DG of Fine Arts Yan Naing Oo explained the Ministry's mission and expressed interest in facilitating future Embassy cultural programs in Burma. PAO explained that with the support of Washington, a Rhythm Road musical group and a dance group will be visiting Burma in 2009. Post plans on extending its reach with these live performances by utilizing the Jefferson Center in Mandalay (which has extensive outdoor grounds) and possibly state-owned facilities in Rangoon, such as the National Theater. The DG was noncommittal on public venues, saying that the Rangoon

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regional military commander, in conjunction with MOFA, would have the final say on such matters. He also deflected our request for assistance with visas for the performers, referring us to MOFA.

16. (C) The meeting with the Ministry of Education was less productive, largely because the DG for Higher Education did not attend (he was reportedly traveling at the time - another meeting will be arranged in Rangoon). DG of Educational Planning and Training U Bo Win is responsible for primary and secondary education, and referred our questions regarding the journalism school to a future meeting with the DG of Higher Education.

Comment  
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17. (C) All of the mid-level officials we saw in Nay Pyi Taw were former military officers, but they proved as welcoming and as eager for greater Embassy contact as the career diplomats we have met at MOFA (reftel). We doubt their interest in cooperation with the Embassy will be shared by their superiors, however. We are particularly intrigued by the possibility of getting VOA TV programming back on the air in Burma, but expect this will be a tough sell with the senior generals. Still, we'll follow up on that and other initiatives with these three ministries and see what happens.  
VAJDA